6: Honigmann E-5 (1943-1945)1954 ND12 Nahane ND12



that the Kaska Indians had known moose "a long, long time ago." Subsequently the animal disappeared and when it returned the people had lost the art of hunting the animal. Informants spoke of aboriginal techniques for hunting moose, indicating that the animal entered the region prior to the beginning of acculturation. Linguistically it is interesting to compare the Kaska word for moose, gaʊ or ketɔ, with the terms kǫlǫn and ulǫn used by the Fort Nelson Slave. Elk and deer were more certainly originally absent in the Cassiar and have only recently begun to appear west of the Rockies. Thus a deer was killed about seven miles southeast of the confluence of the Liard and Frances rivers about 1928. In the summer of 1944 Indians expressed great interest in what were presumed to be deer tracks encountered in the soft shoulders of the Alaska Highway near Lower Post. Similar tracks appeared along the Liard near the confluence of the Frances River. Perhaps the highway has been responsible for the animal's intensified westerly migration. According to Williams, "the most northerly herd of wapiti (elk) is resident in the vicinity of Tuchodi Lake," the source of the Smith River.[13] Weasel and skunk are also reported to be recent arrivals in the district. Wild fowl include grouse, spruce (fool) hens, ptarmigan, owl, eagle, crow, swan, loon, and a relatively small number of geese and duck. In summer Lower Post harbors a small colony of swallows but they originally came from England. Rivers and lakes contain grayling sucker, trout, whitefish, inche (ling), and pike. Watson Lake, 23 miles northwest of Lower Post, once provided an important source of whitefish for the Indians.[14] Salmon are known to run in the Stikine, Pelly, and Ross rivers but are absent from the region of which we speak.

A geographically interesting feature of the region is the hot springs that erupt about 100 miles east of Lower Post. These warm, sulphurous waters have long excited interest in the Cassiar, giving rise to stories of hidden and mysterious "tropical valleys."[15] The writer visited one of these springs located about a mile west of the bridge where the Alaska Highway makes its easternmost crossing of the Liard. The vegetation is indeed more luxuriant near the pool of warm water and photographs prove that the springs resist freezing in winter. The area of such exuberant growth, however, is extremely circumscribed.[16]

## KASKA TRIBES AND THEIR NEIGHBORS

Sometime within the past 20,000 years man probably first set foot in the Cassiar. The immediate point from which those early settlers had migrated presumably lay somewhere to the northwest. At a somewhat greater distance in time and space the forefathers

[13] Williams, *Geological Reconnaissance along the Alaska Highway from Fort Nelson, British Columbia, to Watson Lake, Yukon* (1944), 3.

[14] Named after a Yorkshireman who settled there and married an Indian woman. Watson is dead but in 1943 Mrs. Watson continued to live near the airdrome at the Lake with her daughters, a son-in-law (a Beaver Indian métis), and two grandchildren.

[15] Johnston, *Gold Placers of Dease Lake Area, Cassiar District, B. C.* (1938), 38A; Godsell, *Romance of the Alaska Highway* (1944), 86-92.

[16] See also Williams, *Geological Reconnaissance along the Alaska Highway from Fort Nelson, British Columbia, to Watson Lake, Yukon* (1944), 31.

6: Honigmann E-5 (1943-1945)1954 ND12 Nahane ND12



of the people called Kaska must have crossed Bering Strait enroute from Asia. Leechman, who assumes migration movements toward the headwaters of the Yukon and thence along the Pelly, Liard, and Frances rivers, discovered along the Whitehorse and Snag sections of the Alaska Highway "chipped points, scrapers, large blades, a few other implements and large numbers of chips and flakes. The material employed was for the most part a fine-grained grey chert with a fairly well-marked conchoidal fracture; a certain amount of jasper and obsidian was also used."[17] Such may perhaps have been the primary tools of the early intermontane people, Whitehorse being only 300 miles northwest of Lower Post. Further south along the Highway Frederick Johnson discovered other cultural remains whose age he estimates to be about 7,000-9,000 years.[18] At least it is certain that the remote ancestors of the Kaska lived by food gathering and possessed the general pattern of social organization associated with such a technological base.

Between the time of the earliest arrival of the human stock and the day when the white man began to bring goods to trade for the Indians' furs there were undoubtedly many shifts in the Cassiar population. Evidence exists today that migration brought people from the Fort Nelson River valley into Kaska territory. Once the trader arrived, more extensive shifts of people took place, the movement now being inspired by the desire for favorable fur prices and the trader's goods. Between 1890 and 1900 the peak of such mobility appears to have been reached and it thoroughly scrambled the Cassiar population.

At the time when the more easterly Cassiar people first contacted the white man in the Mackenzie basin the group collectively and gratuitously referred to as Kaska (synonymy: Casca) was divided into a number of macrocosmic groups or tribes. These units have been variously named, the confusion being due to the fact that the groups were loosely organized and failed to adopt fixed tribal designations of their own. The nomenclature to be given here reflects ideas in the minds of Indian informants concerning more or less delimited human aggregates. It is not likely that if different informants had been consulted the same designations would have been obtained. As a matter of fact the same informants might have altered their classifications from time to time. Before presenting this scheme, it is proposed to examine earlier writers' subdivisions of the Cassiar people.

According to Dawson the Kaska, bounded on the west by the Tahltan, hunted in the country drained by the Dease River "but north of the sources of streams reaching the Dease, they wander seldom" except as far "as Frances Lake."[19] East of the Dease they occupied the drainage of the Turnagain (Black) River "but not to the headwater of that stream, as the country there is claimed by the Al-ta'-tin ("Sicconie") of Bear Lake region. . . ." They also exploited the country northeast as far as Fort Halkett, where

[17] Leechman, *Prehistoric Migration Routes through the Yukon* (1946), 387-388.

[18] Johnson, *Archaeological Survey along the Alaska Highway* (1946). He discovered no sites between Teslin village and Muncho Lake. The latter place is already outside of the Cassiar proper.

[19] Dawson, *Report of an Exploration in the Yukon District, N. W. T., and Adjacent Northern Portion of British Columbia, 1887* (1887-88), 200.